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The Dignity of Man: An Islamic Perspective. By Mohammad Hashim Kamali. Pp. 118. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society. 2002. £29.99 hardback / £13.99 paperback.

At a time when the dignity of Muslims in particular, but also of many other human beings, is being systematically disregarded and degraded in many places throughout the world, it is refreshing to read the Islamic teachings that foster respect for human beings, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Particularly poignant is the Prophetic *ḥadīth* referenced to Suyūṭī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: 'When you see my community afraid of addressing a tyrant with "O tyrant", then it is not worth belonging to it any more' (p. 41). This is followed closely by another from Ibn Mājāh, in which the Prophet says: 'When someone sees an occasion in which he should speak out for the sake of God but he does not, then God Most High will tell [*sic*] him on the Day of Judgement: what stopped you from speaking on this issue? And when the person answers: the fear of people, then God says, you should have feared Me and put Me above fearing others' (p. 42).

In this book, Kamali speaks out in a positive way, explaining the just, yet humane and lenient, Islamic teachings on human dignity. He argues that 'to take dignity as the goal and purpose of human rights would be to enrich the calibre and substance of [human] rights' (p. xv). The 'Introduction' gets to grips with the differences between Islamic and Human Rights law, showing that Islamic law transcends the limitations under which the UN declaration was formulated. As it focuses on the individual, Islamic law is not bound by modern ideas of nation states; as positive, divinely-ordained law, it is not reacting against human rights violations by governments but establishing a universal standard of right and wrong behaviour, 'in which ultimate sovereignty belongs only to God. Both the individual and the state are subject to the same law and their basic rights and duties are predetermined by the Shari'ah ... When the state succeeds in enforcing the Shari'ah it satisfies the basic purpose of its existence' (p. xiv). Kamali claims that there is a 'growing recognition of the view that the state is a potential ally and protector of civil liberties' rather than (as has so often proved to be the case) a danger to those liberties.

The rich and wide-ranging Islamic concepts relating to human dignity, integral to the message of the Qur'an and the example provided by the Prophet Muḥammad, are clearly explained in short chapters such as; 'God's Love for Humanity', 'Right to Personal Safety', 'Dignity and Just Character', 'Commitment to Virtue', 'Accountability in Government', 'Social Decorum', 'Safeguards Against Physical Abuse', 'Dignity and the Issue of Basic Human Needs'. Kamali shows the textual basis for each point, in the time-honoured way of Islamic scholarship, with referenced quotations from the Qur'an and *ḥadīth*, including the Arabic texts so that it is possible for those who know Arabic to compare the interpretation given with the original Arabic. The picture that emerges is a fitting antidote to the prevailing Western image

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of Islamic law as strict and punitive (during the time of the Crusades Islam was seen in the West as over-lenient; see, for example, Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West*, Oxford: One World 1993, pp. 176ff). In the chapters on 'Commitment to Virtue' (mainly about the duty of *ḥisba*) and 'Safeguards against Physical Abuse', Kamali quotes several *aḥādīth* about leniency in punishment including: 'God will punish [in the Hereafter] those who punish people [in this world]', 'It is better to err in forgiveness than in punishment', and 'Leniency does not fail to yield beauty, and harshness does not fail to yield ugliness'. The purpose of judges is encapsulated in the Prophet's advice to the judges Mūsā al-Ashᶜarī and Muᶜādh ibn Jabal: 'Bring ease [to the people] not hardship, and give them good news, not gloom.' God is merciful even to sinners and tells them not to despair of His mercy (p. 17).

In two chapters Kamali argues that suicide is forbidden in Islam (pp. 23–4 and pp. 84–5). He also argues, referring to Abu Zahra's *al-Mujtamaᶜ al-insānī*, that heinous conduct by an enemy, such as the killing of innocent women and children, should not be reciprocated because it is 'impermissible to exceed the limits of propriety and indulge in depraved and objectionable behaviour that violates human dignity' (p. 52). Such noble aspirations, though claimed by all 'civilised' countries, seem to be a rarity, both in history and in the world today, in which raw, blind emotion seems to rule the day. The often repeated injunction in the Qur'an to 'repel evil with good' is followed in Q. 41:35 with the reservation, *but only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness*, and in Q. 41:36 with the advice to each individual, *If a prompting from Satan should stir you, seek refuge with God: He is the All Hearing and the All Knowing*. Nonetheless it is important to keep pressing home the message at every opportunity, as this book does admirably.

The 'Conclusion' endorses the words of Musa Hitam, leader of the Malaysian delegation to the UN: 'Indeed the UN Declaration contains the teachings of all the major religions of the world and merits adherence as close as possible by all,' but it also encourages Muslims, in the words of Sinnar, not to refrain from 'questioning the contemporary understanding of human rights – not to undermine it but to enhance our universal quest for a more just and more humane world' (p. 104). Kamali's book is an excellent, brief and clear contribution to the effort to 'enhance' this declaration and to ensure that it is 'the product of shared aspirations and efforts by all concerned' so that it can be made 'an integral part of the constitutions of all the member states of the United Nations' (p. 104). It is to be hoped that, if and when this happens, all the member states take note of it and amend their human rights practice accordingly. We must 'never despair of the Mercy of Allah' or His power to bring this about, if only, like the UN declaration, through people's reactions against existing blatant violations of human dignity.

HARFIYAH BALL HALEEM

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